

i hope you find your peace by Redburn

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Summary:

"Do you want to be normal? To be like everyone else?"

Will Byers had grown up without a father, thinking that what he felt for his best friend was wrong. He just needed someone to tell him he wasn't, and that he was still loved.

i hope you find your peace

Author's Note:

hey so, after season 2 this has been on my mind for a while now. i'm wondering if the duffer brothers will hint at it more, and if so, then that will be the day that i cry.

warnings ahead for foul language. and lots of it. but our boy is happy in the end. some of these experiences are drawn from my childhood, and maybe for some of you as well. and no matter the outcome of stranger things, Will will always hold a special place in my heart. I hope you all enjoy this xx

(When Will is four years old, he meets Mike at the playground.)

“Um...”

Will snapped his attention away from a bug at his feet and looked up, startled to find a boy standing next to the other empty swing. He shuffled around, seemingly shy. Will felt suddenly shy as well. Did this boy want him to leave so he could have the swings to himself?

“Can we... can we be friends?”

Will gripped the chains of the swing tighter. Nerves crept up his spine, but in a good way. *Friends*. He knew that word – knew what exactly it meant. He nodded fast, as if the boy might change his mind.

“Yes. I wanna be friends.”

The boy smiled brightly and sat down on the other swing. He held out his hand, and Will took it without hesitation. Maybe he was supposed to let go when the boy gave him a strange look, but then he smiled again.

“My name’s Mike. What’s yours?”

“Will. I’m Will.”

Mike nodded, like they had just shared a secret.

Together they swung back and forth, still holding hands, and Will had made his first ever friend in the world.

*

(When Will is five years old, he comes home from school one day and overhears his mum and dad fighting.)

He’s crouched down low outside the back of their house, hidden from sight. He could hear his dad stomping around inside the kitchen, voice bellowing and slurred. His mum was much quieter, as if trying to calm him.

“What the hell’s wrong with him, huh? He’s not *normal*, Joyce!”

“He’s only five, Lonnie. You’re drunk, just – calm down, okay, *please?*”

“Ah, shut up! The boy’s a nutter!” his dad yelled back. “I try to take him out to play ball, but he’d rather spend his time inside drawing pansy-ass rainbow shit in his room!”

Will looked down at his shoes. He thought of the latest character he’d drawn from his dreams: a purple octopus with pogo sticks for arms. There’s more movement inside, followed by a shattering of something made of glass. Will imagined he was that glass.

“No, no! Everything’s wrong! I got one kid who’s too pussy to shoot a damn *hare* and another who’s a fucking *fag!*”

Will wondered what that meant. It must not be good.

“Don’t you say that,” said his mum sternly. “I cannot *believe* you, Lonnie—”

“It’s true, he’s a goddamn queer and you’ve been encouraging it!”

“Lonnie—” his mum tried to reason with him, but then there’s more

smashing sounds and footsteps heading toward the back door.

Will scrambled away, not wanting his father to see him. The door banged against the wall of the house and he watched from underneath the porch stairs as his father stormed away to the shed.

Even after the dust had settled, Will could not bring himself to move, limbs unwilling to cooperate. He could hear smothered sobs echoing from inside. Instead he curls in on himself and stays there for a long time.

*

(When his father leaves, he asks his mum about it.)

“Sorry, sweetie, what was that?” his mum said, having been too distracted to notice the question. The house was a mess, left behind after she had kicked Lonnie out in a spout of utter rage. Jonathan hadn’t been here to see it happen.

“Did dad leave because of me?” he asked again quietly.

“Oh,” she breathed out, and pulled him onto her lap. “Of course not, sweetie. *Never*. You’re his special little man, okay?”

“But Dad said I was wrong. He said I was a... fag?” Will hoped he used the right word.

“No, *no*,” she said quickly, somehow squeezing him even tighter. “You’re not wrong at all. Your dad was just angry at *himself*, not *you*, okay? Will, listen to me: you are *not* wrong. You are special, and good, and there is *nothing* wrong with you.”

After a pause Will nodded, if only to make his mother happy again. He still didn’t quite understand it all, but as long as his father hadn’t left because of him, then maybe it would be okay. Maybe he would come back to them.

Joyce held him close and hummed for a very long time, until Jonathan came home and her tears started to fall again.

*

(When Will is nine years old, he hears that word again at school.)

“What are you fags doing over here?” said Troy, a bully who liked to pick on them at school. His friend James stood next to him and laughed.

“It’s none of your business,” answered Mike. Will thought he was brave for always standing up to Troy.

“It don’t *look* like none of my business,” sneered Troy, stepping closer.

Will had been busy showing his friends his sketch book earlier. He sometimes liked to bring it to school to show his art teacher what he would be drawing at home. Dustin enjoyed introducing him to characters in their D&D handbook, and Lucas had said Will could “totally make up his own character” because he was really talented like that. Mike had been in the middle of saying how much he liked Will’s drawings when their bullies interrupted them.

“Just leave us alone,” said Dustin as he tried to stand strong.

Troy and James laughed again. “Easy there, newbie. You might hurt someone with that lisp of yours,” he mock imitated.

Will shook his head, wishing he could say something to make them go away. Troy turned on him, eyes trailing down to the sketch book and Will tried to hide it quickly. He wasn’t fast enough, and in the end Troy managed to snatch it from his hands and began flipping through it.

“Look at all of these drawings,” said Troy, showing it to James as well. “My, you’re *very* good.”

Will swallowed, thinking maybe Troy actually did like his drawings. But then Troy began ripping pages out and throwing them to the ground, and all Will could see was his dad being disgusted of his son’s vivid imagination and leaving him behind without another word.

“Hey, stop that!” shouted Mike, and Will watched as his friend struggled to get the book back for him. Eventually Troy grew bored

and shoved the book toward Mike, muttering “Bunch of faeries you lot are,” as he and James left them once the bell started to ring.

With trembling hands Will bent down to pick up a drawing he’d done months ago. It was another version of his ‘rainbow ship’. He remembers how his mum had loved it so much she kept the very first one, and since that day Will had felt so good about his talent that he never stopped sketching his ship over and over again.

“I’m sorry, Will, I tried to get them back,” said Mike, holding in his hands all of the drawings Troy had ruined.

“I know. Thank you,” said Will gratefully. Mike smiled sadly at him.

They all went back inside to go to class, and when Dustin and Lucas walked on ahead, Will reached out to hold Mike’s hand in his. Mike squeezed back, and Will felt unconditionally loved.

*

(When Will is eleven years old, he gets beat up for the first time.)

He was alone when it happened. School had finished and he was waiting for Jonathan to drive by and pick him up in the family car. Will thought his brother was badass to already be driving like their mum did.

“Hey, fairy-boy!”

Will tensed, not knowing if he should run away or hope that Jonathan would get here soon. Before he could make a choice he was being shoved to the ground and two figures loomed over him, both with menacing grins.

“You daydreaming, huh, Byers? Too busy being stuck in *queerland* to pay attention to the real world?” taunted Troy.

“Go away,” whispered Will.

“Oh, what was that?” said Troy, cupping his ear. James bent down to clench the front of Will’s jacket, hoisting him up to spit in his face. “We didn’t hear you.”

Will felt tears prickle at his eyes. He tried to think of his mum's voice, calm and gentle. "I said go away," he repeated, growing brave and looking directly at James.

The next few minutes were a blur.

He's thrown to the ground again, with James holding down his feet and Troy at his front, pulling at his hair and grinding dirt on his face. He tried to get them to stop, yelling and begging, but neither boy listened. Instead, Troy pulled his hand back and it formed into a fist, and after a moment it's colliding with Will's nose.

His entire vision goes fuzzy and he can't focus right. Troy's voice is fading fast and there's a ringing in his ear. Another hit lands in almost the exact same place, and Will felt something crack as pain begins to throb over and over from his nose.

"Hey, *hey!*"

Will didn't know what happened next, except the bullies left him alone and then a dark figure was trying desperately to lift him up.

"... Dad?" he thought he asked, and it's the last thing he remembered before his eyes slipped shut.

When he woke up it must be much later, because now it's dark when he looked out the window. He noticed his mum next, sleeping soundly in a chair, her hand warm and tight over his own.

"Hey, buddy," said a familiar voice. Will turned to see Jonathan on his other side, expression relieved. "Hey, you're okay now. You're safe with us."

Will observed his surroundings; they weren't recognizable, until he saw a doctor walk by the open door. "Why... am I in the hospital?"

Jonathan held Will's other hand. "Those kids hurt you pretty bad. They broke your nose, so we had to bring you here to fix it," he said, and he sounded angry.

Curiously, Will reached up to touch his nose, and hissed when he made contact. Jonathan laughed sadly.

“Don’t touch it for a while, okay?” he warned. Will nodded, and felt another wave of tears threaten to spill. Why was he so *weak*? Jonathan shifted closer. “Will, I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry they hurt you. I should have been there to stop them...”

“You can’t always be there,” said Will.

Maybe his dad had been right.

Jonathan said nothing more, and Will fell back to sleep and dreamt of his rainbow ship taking him far, far away.

*

(When Will is thirteen years old, he meets Eleven for the first time.)

Everything that had happened in the past few hours were still trying to catch up to him.

The gate had been closed. The Demogorgon’s had fallen dead. The... the shadow monster wasn’t controlling him anymore.

“It’s all over, sweetie, you’re okay,” his mother kept repeating, clutching him tighter and refusing to let him go. Will only wanted to sleep, complete exhaustion crushing him further down onto the bed.

Eventually, they drove back to their house. Everyone was there. His friends all came over to say hi, to hug him and to check on him and make sure he was back to normal.

Do you want to be normal? To be like everyone else?

His brother had said that to him.

Did he want to be normal? Was he normal? Or was he still a freak?

There was a girl standing in their living room, and Chief Hopper’s arm was wrapped around her shoulders. Will had never met her before. He guessed she must be Eleven.

Eleven would understand.

Mike had said that to him.

Mike.

Will looked around for his friend, suddenly needing to see him. He was talking to Nancy, expression anxious before finally walking over to where Eleven still stood. He smiled at her, features soft, and she smiled back. And then he reached out to hold her hand and their fingers intertwined.

Will's breath got stuck in his throat.

It used to be him holding Mike's hand. Just him.

Then we'll go crazy together, right?

Yeah, crazy together.

No one wanted to separate tonight, it seemed, so both his mum and Chief Hopper set up beds around the house, and soon everybody was collapsing, all falling into deep sleeps and holding each other close for fear of the unknown. Will still dreamt of the shadow monster holding him in its clutches, but when he woke up the next morning, he can remember it was finally over.

One by one they all leave – first his friends, with a reluctant Mike stepping closer to Eleven before being pushed along by Nancy and Steve.

Will found a moment to walk over to Eleven as Chief Hopper talked to his mum, and Eleven spoke before he had the chance.

“You're Will.”

He nodded. “And you're Eleven,” he said back.

There's an awkward pause between them. From how often Mike had talked about her, how she would understand, Will felt as though he should know what to say. There were so many questions he wanted to ask, *should* ask, but what came out was: “So, you and... Mike?”

She tilted her head, eyebrows furrowed. “Mike?”

“Yeah, you...” he trailed off, unable to finish.

“You are best friends.”

Will looked at her, surprised. “He said that?”

“He spoke of you a lot when we were trying to find you.”

Will felt warm, if only for a moment. He cleared his throat. “Yeah, Mike talked about you a lot when you were gone, too.”

They fell silent again. Chief Hopper came over to tell Eleven they’re leaving. She said goodbye to them and Will watched them drive off down the road until they were out of sight. His mother ushered him back inside, saying she was going to make them all some breakfast.

Will thought about Eleven and Mike, about what it all meant, until his mother started screaming about a Demogorgon in their fridge.

*

When it came time for the Snow Ball dance, Will wasn’t worried about finding a date.

He spent his time standing and talking with Mike. His friends all seemed keen on dancing with a girl, though, and Will tried hard to see the appeal.

“Do you wanna dance?”

The question was aimed toward him, and Will felt instantly paralyzed as the girl waited for an answer. He looked to Mike almost subconsciously, and his friend urged him to say yes. With a timid smile he stepped out onto the dance floor with her, but something just didn’t feel right.

Later, he glanced over to see Mike dancing with Eleven. He looked so happy. Will wondered why he didn’t look at this girl like that, too.

The further the night went on, the more Will felt his smile disappear.

*

(When Will is fifteen years old, he learns the real meaning for it all.)

Will knew he must be different.

Because normal people don't watch their best friend from afar, wishing it was himself softly kissing Mike instead of the girl huddled close to his side – the girl, El, who was also his friend now.

He should be happy for them, right?

Only every time he looked at them, smiling and together, Will only felt hollow.

What the hell's wrong with him, huh? He's not normal, Joyce!

His dad's voice still rang clear, even now. After choosing to draw instead of play catch, he had lost a father. After his time in the Upside Down, people had called him Zombie Boy and avoided him in the halls. After being possessed by the shadow monster and almost losing himself, people had thought he was crazy.

And now... now he...

He got up and left hastily, ignoring the curious calls from his friends as he goes, Mike's voice standing out the most.

There's a feeling, growing bigger and bigger in his chest as he rides, peddling faster and faster away from something he despises being this afraid of. He pulled up to his mum's work, running inside and searching around for her in a panic.

"Mum? *Mum!*"

There's some noise from out the back, and then he heard: "Will? Is that you?"

The second he sees her he broke, tears falling big and hot, and she dropped whatever she was holding and pulled him in. They stand there for a long time in the quiet of the store, until she guided him out the back to sit down before fetching him a glass of water.

"Honey, did something happen? Did... did you have an episode?" she

asked, sounding terrified.

Will shook his head 'no', trying desperately to find the words. There were a million lumps forming in his throat, all stopping him, and all that came out was a wretched sob as he buried his face in his hands. Joyce rubbed his back comfortingly, patient like a mother, and Will was so, so scared.

"Mum, I think I... I'm..."

"It's okay sweetie, take your time," she said, and her hand never once stopped rubbing in soothing circles.

"Was dad right?" he finally whispered into the air. "Am I a fag? I don't care about playing sports. I... don't like girls like my friends do, I think. I tried, I really did, mum. But I just..."

The weight grew heavier. He felt sick; he felt wrong, wrong, *wrong*.

"Will..." his mother cried, too, and Will prepared for the worst. She cupped his cheeks gently, and brought his gaze up to meet hers. "There is nothing wrong with you. There never has been, okay?"

Will choked up. "But—"

"No, Will, listen to me," she said, lips trembling when she smiled. "You are *not* a fag. 'Fag' is a horrible word, okay? And you are not horrible, you are anything *but*."

"Okay," whispered Will, still unsure.

His mum kept talking. "There's another word for it, and it's 'gay'. And if... if that's how you really feel, then that's what it's called. That's the word you use."

Will sucked in a deep breath, hands clammy and tongue heavy. "Gay," he repeated.

"Yes," she nodded, stroking his cheek with her thumb. "Someone who is gay isn't wrong. And it doesn't define who you are. All it means is that you like other boys, and that's it."

“That’s it?” he asked.

“That’s it,” she said.

“Are you... are you mad?”

“No, sweetie. I could never be mad,” still smiling, she pulled him closer again, and just like that Will felt like he could breathe again. “I love you, and whoever it is you choose to love.”

Fresh tears ran down his cheeks, and then Will closed his eyes and thought of his mum proudly showing off his drawings. He thought of his friends, and he thought of all of the girls he’s never liked and of the one boy he does like.

He imagined his rainbow ship and felt, for the first time, that maybe one day he could be truly happy.

*